

Research Article

Health according to the experiences of Iranian women with diabetes: A phenomenological study

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Abstract

This study explores the meaning of health among Iranian women with diabetes using hermeneutic phenomenology based on Van Manen's approach. A total of 19 women with diabetes who were referred to the Diabetes Center of Imam Khomeini hospital in Ardabil, Iran were recruited using a purposive sampling method. Data were gathered through semi-structured interviews. Each interview was transcribed verbatim and analyzed simultaneously. Data analysis led to the emergence of five main themes: a God-centered life, health as a precious possession, health as wellbeing, independence, and acceptance. Patients often described coping with their illnesses and pursuing lifestyle changes by applying their spiritual and religious beliefs. The findings of this study can be used by healthcare teams to revise their opinions about patients with diabetes according to the culture of their patients.

Key words

diabetes, health, Iran, phenomenology, women.

INTRODUCTION

Health is a key concept of nursing (Crawford-Shearer *et al.*, 2009). The definition of health has developed alongside the growth of knowledge and theories over time (Jiuan, 1993). Definitions of health include: the absence of disease, biological function, and statistical normalcy (Boorse, 1997; Cooper, 2002), having the capability to cope with life's demands (Bircher, 2005; Nordenfelt, 2007), the ability to perform the functions of personal and social life (Ravenell *et al.*, 2006), being happy (Hartweg & Isabelli-García, 2007), and having "the ability to self-manage in the face of social, physical, and emotional challenges" (Huber *et al.*, 2011).

Many nursing theorists have rejected the medical model of caring, and have instead begun searching for nursing's own models, returning to a more holistic approach. As a result, the medical concept of health has become less useful for the nursing profession. A more workable model may be to regard people with disease as still have the capacity to be healthy (Klimenko *et al.*, 2006).

People who have type 2 diabetes are subject to various problems that can affect their health-related quality of life

(Hanninen *et al.*, 2001). Diabetes may have more adverse effects on the feelings of health than other chronic diseases because diabetes management is an essential element of daily life, which necessitates extensive education and lifestyle changes (Azizi *et al.*, 2003).

LITERATURE REVIEW

Some studies have been conducted in Iran on the quality of life of people living with diabetes (Ghanbari *et al.*, 2005; Delavari *et al.*, 2009) and their self-care (Baghiani-Moghadam *et al.*, 2009; Baradaran *et al.*, 2010). In addition, researchers have studied the physical problems (Janghorbani *et al.*, 2006), the coping strategies (Abdoli *et al.*, 2008) and the lifestyle (Harati *et al.*, 2010) of people with diabetes. Thus far, all of these studies have employed a quantitative approach. There is no published research on the experiences of women with diabetes in Iran. Moreover, Edwards (2000) acknowledges that the goal of nursing includes changing health concepts from nursing's point of view, and stresses that quality of life should be carefully studied from patients' perspectives in consideration of their life experiences, and their understanding of health concepts.

Elucidating the health experiences of diabetic patients in general, and in female patients in particular, is a practical way of improving nursing and care for diabetic patients. Furthermore, it will increase the nursing body of knowledge,

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